



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2020 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 07/19/2021

Project Title: Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase VI

Funds Recommended: \$1,736,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2020, Ch. 104, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 2(h)

Appropriation Language: \$1,736,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Pheasants Forever, in cooperation with the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, to acquire lands in fee and restore and enhance lands in the southern Red River valley for wildlife management under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8, or to be designated and managed as waterfowl production areas in Minnesota in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquiring lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96, or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Eran Sandquist

Title: State Coordinator

Organization: MN Prairie Chicken Society / Pheasants Forever, Inc.

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Location Information

County Location(s): Mahnomen, Clay, Becker, Norman, Wilkin and Polk.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

The Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership VI accelerates the protection and restoration of 408 acres of strategic prairie chicken-focused habitats that will be transferred to the MNDNR as a WMA or to the USFWS as a WPA and are open to public hunting. MN Prairie Chicken Society and Pheasants Forever will protect parcels that focus specifically on prairie chicken benefits, which makes this proposal unique and highly focused. All acquisitions will occur within the prairie and prairie/forest transition planning regions with a focus in Clay, Norman, Mahnomen and Wilkin counties as this is the primary range of prairie chickens.

Design and Scope of Work

The Problem: In Minnesota, greater prairie chickens are largely restricted to the beach ridges of the Glacial Lake Agassiz region. Greater prairie chickens require large blocks of grasslands, with a minimum of 320 acres at any one site. The makeup of these grassland complexes should include numerous successional states of habitat to sustain a local population. Greater prairie chickens are a “flagship” species in the sense that if we have greater prairie chickens on the landscape, then we have also included the habitat needs of many additional grassland-dependent wildlife species with less exacting habitat requirements. Greater prairie chicken habitat has declined dramatically in recent years due to 1) loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres and 2) conversion of grasslands; (including remnant native prairie), to row crop production.

An Approach to the Problem: This partnership protects native and restored prairies, sedge meadows, and other types of grasslands and associated wetlands to promote the growth and stability of greater prairie chicken populations. This is a very focused proposal with the priority of protecting remnant prairies within core and corridor areas of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. All projects acquired under this proposal will be restored and/or enhanced to be productive grassland habitat as part of the grant activity. Once acquired, the subject tracts will be fully restored and/or enhanced. Our proposed tracts were identified as high priority greater prairie chicken habitat with willing sellers who have an interest in preserving wildlife values of those acres. These tracts were ranked as high priority for greater prairie chicken habitat based on six criteria including: 1) distance to the nearest prairie chicken lek; 2) location in or outside of a core area from the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (MPCP); 3) distance to the nearest public hunting land (WPA or WMA); 4) tract size; 5) current grassland type (native prairie, restored prairie, brome, or row crop; and 6) wetland density and predicted waterfowl breeding pairs (wetlands can provide important habitat for prairie chickens over their annual life cycle).

Benefits: By protecting, restoring and enhancing grasslands and wetlands in the right areas, this partnership delivers on many of the goals of state side conservation plans. In fact, one ecosystem measure of the Prairie Conservation Plan (MPCP) success is to have stable or increasing greater prairie chicken populations in Minnesota. The MPCP is ideally suited for greater prairie chicken management with core areas containing large contiguous blocks of grassland and smaller grassland patches scattered across the landscape called corridors that allow birds to maintain populations outside the core areas as well as move across the landscape. In addition to grassland

conservation, most tracts have extensive wetlands. Restoring and maintaining these wetlands will have several benefits including water storage, sequestering and storing carbon, water quality, diversity of flora and fauna, and reducing erosion. Providing secure habitat for greater prairie chickens also provides habitat for a host of other grassland species.

How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?

There are a number of game, non-game, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that benefit from this partnership's results. Pheasants Forever uses GIS layers and works with DNR staff to identify rare, threatened and endangered species that occur on or near a project. The State of North America's Birds 2016 report shows how many of our continent's grassland birds are in steep declines, and species dependent on grasslands are also threatened. SGCN for this region include 35 vertebrate animals, 59 plants, and 13 invertebrate animals. Many of the proposed tracts contain native prairie communities as mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey. Depending on the quality, these native tracts likely have a number of T&E prairie dependent species on them which will be protected. This proposal aims to increase greater prairie chicken numbers in Minnesota by adding to and creating a connected system of grassland habitats across the landscape. In this way, we are addressing the limiting factor to greater prairie chicken populations, while also building more protected high quality habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species. We work in close coordination with partners and land managers on the restoration and enhancement of all acquired tracts. When SGCN are located on or near project tracts, the restoration/enhancement activities add habitat value for these species.

Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

This proposal is fully integrated into the MN Prairie Conservation Plan as described in the "design and scope of work" section. Most of the tracts listed are within core areas, have remnant native prairie on them, and are adjacent to existing WMAs/WPAs. We continue to build upon past conservation efforts. Most tracts are within less than a half mile of known greater prairie chicken habitat and leks. The latest geospatial layers will be used to help identify and evaluate projects such as the MN County Biological Survey, core and corridors in the Prairie Conservation Plan, high priority areas within the MN Wildlife Action Plan, etc. to make the best science-based decisions as possible. We also strive to protect habitat where we will have the best return on investment that have the greatest impact on prairie chicken populations. Close coordination with local resource managers will further ensure that this partnership is delivering the best results for the investment.

A recent study by MN DNR researcher, Dr. Charlotte Roy, and collaborators Dr. Andrew Gregory (Bowling Green State University) and Eric Nelson (MN DNR), informs us about landscape connectivity gaps for greater prairie chickens. Using landscape genetic techniques, Dr. Roy and her colleagues learned that greater prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to greater prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. Their findings suggest that providing quality grassland habitat in Norman and Polk counties should be a priority to improve connectivity in the planned corridor. The genetic data obtained also indicates that birds in Norman County are moving less than other areas, which could put them at risk for inbreeding in the future, particularly if habitat needs are not addressed. To begin addressing this conservation need, the researchers recommend increasing grassland quantity and improving grassland quality near areas from which greater prairie chickens can expand, to begin making connections between core areas in the planned corridor.

Which two sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are most applicable to this project?

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

Available funding continues to be a limiting factor for protection programs. With CRP authority declining in the current farm bill, Minnesota is experiencing significant CRP acres (largely grassland practices) expiring out of the program. Permanent conservation efforts must be accelerated to sustain or grow grassland habitat for wildlife. Before the passage of the Legacy Amendment, PF would acquire approximately 1,000 acres/year to become WMAs or WPAs in this area. This grant significantly accelerates our ability to acquire priority parcels and more than triples our historic annual accomplishments. This proposal accelerates the protection and restoration of valuable grassland habitat that focus on greater prairie chickens and other wildlife while providing additional public access to hunting, bird watching, trapping or otherwise recreate in Minnesota's great outdoors.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.

This proposal supplements past investments and is aimed at accelerating the protection and restoration of strategic parcels.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
Annual	-	None

How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

All lands will be enrolled into the WMA or WPA system and will be managed in perpetuity by the MN DNR or USFWS, respectively. All acquisitions will be restored and/or enhanced to as high quality as practicable, with the knowledge that quality and comprehensive restorations utilizing native species result in lower management costs. In addition, local PF chapter members and volunteers maintain significant interest in seeing the habitat and

productivity of acquired parcels are high. MPCS, PF, DNR and USFWS will develop an ecological restoration and management plan for each parcel. Grant and partner dollars will be used for the initial site development and restoration/enhancement work.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Post Transfer - WMA	DNR - Game and Fish Funds	Standard long-term maintenance; fire, invasives control, etc	-	-
Post Transfer - WPA	USFWS - Federal	Standard long-term maintenance; fire, invasives control, etc	-	-

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

At minimum, we will notify local government in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the state and follow up with questions prior to the acquisition. In cases where there is interest, we will also indicate our willingness to attend or ask to attend county or township meetings to communicate our interest in the projects and seek support.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection?

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

Because we are working within priority habitat areas, it is possible that parcels could have perpetual easements on a portion of them. If a parcel has a perpetual easement and is deemed a high priority by the partners, we will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed, or use non-state funding to acquire the protected portion of the property.

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program?

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

The primary purposes of WMAs are to develop and manage for the production of wildlife and for compatible outdoor recreation. To fulfill those goals, the DNR may use limited farming specifically to enhance or benefit the management of state lands for wildlife. This proposal may include initial development plans or restoration plans to utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest to prepare the seedbed for native seed planting. In these restorations, PF's policy is to use non neonicotinoid treated seed and no herbicides other than glyphosate. On a small percentage of WMAs (less than 2.5%), DNR uses farming to provide a winter food source for a variety of wildlife species in agriculture-dominated landscapes largely devoid of winter

food sources. There are no immediate plans to use farming for winter food on any of the parcels in this proposal.

Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated?

True

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

No variation from State of MN regulations for WMA acquisitions.

All WPA acquisitions will be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, United States Code, title 16, section 668dd, et seq.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- State of MN
- Federal

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WMA
- WPA

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

We anticipate closing on 1-3 tracts through this appropriation.

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

No

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

Yes

Yes. We may also seek additional leverage (i.e. PF chapters, federal, etc.) to supplement the restoration budget contained within this proposal.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Identify priority acquisitions	07/01/2020
Contract appraisals ordered	09/01/2020
Purchase agreements	02/01/2021
Re-evaluate tract priority	02/14/2021
Contract appraisals ordered	04/01/2021

Purchase agreements	09/01/2021
Close on tracts	01/01/2023
Restorations completed	06/30/2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2025

Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$17,200	-	-	\$17,200
Contracts	\$328,000	-	-	\$328,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$790,000	\$12,800	PCS, PF, Federal, Private	\$802,800
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$515,000	\$12,800	PCS, PF, Federal, Private	\$527,800
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
Professional Services	\$45,200	-	-	\$45,200
Direct Support Services	\$7,800	-	-	\$7,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$15,800	-	-	\$15,800
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$15,000	-	-	\$15,000
Grand Total	\$1,736,000	\$25,600	-	\$1,761,600

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
PF State Coordinator	0.01	3.0	\$3,400	-	-	\$3,400
PF Field Staff	0.03	3.0	\$7,800	-	-	\$7,800
PF Grants Staff	0.03	3.0	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000

Amount of Request: \$1,736,000

Amount of Leverage: \$25,600

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 1.47%

DSS + Personnel: \$25,000

As a % of the total request: 1.44%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

We have reduced accomplishments/costs proportionately across the overall program to accommodate the reduced appropriation. As a result of the reduction, we will be able to protect fewer acres. As in past appropriations, we will focus on the most strategic, highest priority tracts.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is expected from multiple sources including but not limited to federal sources, land value donations, contractor donations, MPCS and PF. Not every source is 100% confirmed at this point. However, PF has an exemplary track record of delivery and over-achievement of match commitments that further stretch OHF funding.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

We anticipate that all of the contract funding will be used for restoration, enhancement and potentially some initial development of the protected acres. This could include but is not limited to wetland/grassland restoration, tree removal, prescribed fire, building removal, signs, posts, and other development activities.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

No

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

n/a

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:

No

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 4.12%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.0% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference in-kind.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?

07/01/2020

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	247	0	0	247
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	161	0	0	161
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	408	0	0	408

How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	10
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	0
Total	10

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$1,050,000	-	-	\$1,050,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$686,000	-	-	\$686,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$1,736,000	-	-	\$1,736,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	25	0	222	0	247
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	16	0	145	0	161
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	41	0	367	0	408

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$104,800	-	\$945,200	-	\$1,050,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$68,700	-	\$617,300	-	\$686,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$173,500	-	\$1,562,500	-	\$1,736,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$4,251	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$4,260	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$4,192	-	\$4,257	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$4,293	-	\$4,257	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *Strategic parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be protected to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR of United States FWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and "Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan".*

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Strategic parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be protected to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR of United States FWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and "Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan".*

Parcels

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Parcel Information

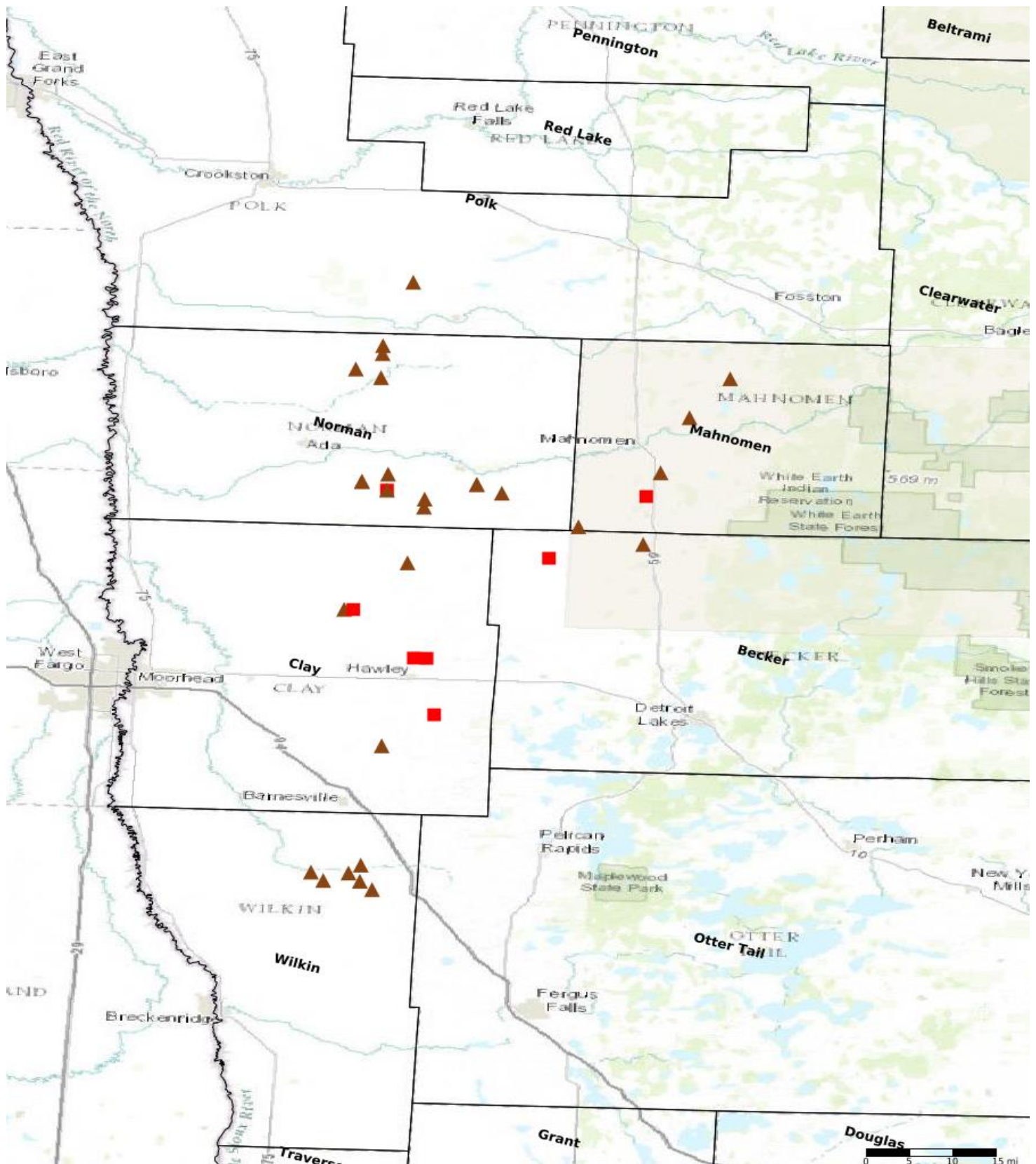
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Spring Creek WMA addition	Becker	14242212	320	\$640,000	No
Shay WPA Addition	Becker	14243223	62	\$245,000	No
Clay County WMA addition	Clay	13845222	160	\$512,000	No
Hoykens WPA addition	Clay	14044230	160	\$544,000	No
Ulen WMA Addition	Clay	14245225	320	\$640,000	No
Anfinson WPA addition	Clay	13944232	151	\$550,000	No
Hatchet Lake WPA addition	Clay	14145229	615	\$1,968,000	No
New WMA	Clay	14145230	622	\$2,500,000	No
Hoykens WPA addition	Clay	14045225	282	\$958,800	No
Coburn WMA addition	Mahnomen	14342231	160	\$416,000	No
Santwire WMA addition	Mahnomen	14441230	930	\$3,200,000	No
Rush WMA	Mahnomen	14541221	140	\$250,000	Yes
Skoog WPA addition	Mahnomen	14342212	80	\$120,000	No
Vanose WMA addition	Mahnomen	14641225	309	\$575,000	No
Rockwell WMA addition	Norman	14445234	160	\$512,000	No
Agassiz Olson WMA addition	Norman	14645216	240	\$820,000	No
Frenchmans Bluff WPA addition	Norman	14343207	60	\$150,000	No
Vagsness WMA addition, Tract 5	Norman	14344202	40	\$40,000	No
Slininger WPA addition	Norman	14345210	320	\$1,024,000	No
Agassiz Olson WMA addition	Norman	14645233	120	\$240,000	No
New WMA	Norman	14645230	640	\$1,600,000	No
Rockwell WMA addition	Norman	14345205	82	\$164,000	No
Rockwell WMA addition	Norman	14345205	100	\$150,000	No
Dalby WMA addition	Norman	14345210	160	\$320,000	No
Neal WMA addition	Norman	14344219	20	\$80,000	No
Neal WMA addition	Norman	14344218	320	\$960,000	No
Vagsness WMA addition, Tract 8	Norman	14344202	60	\$100,000	No
Agassiz Olson WMA addition	Norman	14645209	54	\$81,000	No
Onstad WMA Addition	Polk	14845235	280	\$425,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13545207	160	\$512,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13545221	40	\$128,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13545205	150	\$495,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13546210	320	\$960,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13545217	480	\$1,536,000	No
Rothsay WMA addition	Wilkin	13546214	320	\$1,024,000	No



Parcel Map
Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the
Southern Red River Valley - Phase VI
(Data Generated From Parcel List)